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Love God.
Love Our Neighbors.

SPIRE

February 2023



CW concert on February 5th

FPC music director Greg Homza will be joined by cellist Betsy Goy and pianist Susan McDaniel in a program that offers a relaxing and inspiring mix of music, including folk, jazz, and new-age, that should appeal to everyone. Works by Thad Fiscella, Keith Jarrett, Arvo Pärt, John Rutter, and others. It will surely lift your spirits, soothe your soul, and chill you out all at once.

As always, this concert is offered free of charge as a gift to the community from FPC and CW's generous donors. Complementary parking is available in FPC's garage. This concert is live and not to be missed in person. You can join via livestream as well.



Photos from Doug Blomgren and Richard Blomgren: Two Generations Behind the Camera February 5-March 26, 2023

Doug Blomgren is a member of First Presbyterian and a retired lawyer. He is an amateur photographer—emphasis on “amateur.” His father Richard Blomgren was born in 1920 in Cambridge, Illinois. He served as a photographer in the U.S. Army in Italy in the mid-1940s and became a professional photographer in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Richard had contracted polio as a young boy but escaped the worst of what that disease could cause. Nursed by his mother and two aunts, he recovered well, but for a weak left leg that resulted in him not being accepted into the armed forces until 1944. His younger brother Dean was already serving in Bari, Italy when Richard entered the service and was stationed in Rome and Caserta. He remained there for about 2 years. The palace at Caserta, north of Naples, had become the headquarters of the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations. As a result, many of Richard's photos were of arriving and departing generals, government dignitaries, and others. However, he did have time to take photos of his surroundings and, while on leave, in northern Italy and Switzerland. His photos were mostly taken with a Speed Graphic large format press camera. He also used a Rolleiflex medium format camera which he acquired by trading his cigarette rations.

As a teenager, Doug worked for his father—mostly mopping floors but also in the darkroom and, on occasion, taking photos his father probably thought simple enough for a kid. Perhaps because his father's work was entirely in black and white until the last half of his professional career, Doug prefers black and white too. He opts for color primarily when he thinks color is critical to the image. Doug's interest lie in what some might call “street photography,” capturing the faces and activities that occur around us. He also is drawn to the geometry of our surroundings—the shapes of buildings designed by architects and engineers but made real by craftsmen, craftsmen, and laborers who turn designs into places. Join us on Sunday, February 5 from 11:30 am-1 pm for the Opening Reception of this new Gallery Exhibition.

Pastor's Pen

As we go into February, the weather forecasters tell us that we can expect rain in Portland on about half the days, with just under half an inch as the usual amount. There are usually a few days in the 70s, sometimes even what they term a mini-Spring, but not every year.

Overlapping the changing seasons, there are times in the church year, seasons of sacred time, that invite us to a journey deeper than the passing days. In this season of Lent, a time of preparation for Easter which begins this year on February 22nd with Ash Wednesday, we are invited to re-devote ourselves to the way and work of Christ.

Recently, our Session (the Elders who guide our church) met in retreat to give shape to the church living out its mission to love God and neighbor. This Spring, you'll have a chance to become involved in serving Community Dinners, serving the city through clean-up events, and a variety of other chances to serve together.

An Australian minister, Dorothy McRae McMahan, beckons us in Lent to rededicate ourselves to living out the faith. You're invited to reflect on these words, and see what comes to mind as ways that you might love and serve those around us these days:

*We believe in light beyond our seeing,
Flowing forth from the flame of life in God
Who goes on creating in us
down through the ages of ages.
We believe in healing beyond our knowing
from the Christ whose robe stands close
to the reach of our hand
and the pain of our struggle
beyond the end of time.
We believe in the energy of God's Spirit,
stirring in our being
with a rhythm of courage and passion,
moving our feet to risk Christ's way again
as those who are called to be
humble, human witnesses
to the faithfulness of God.*

*Mission belongs to you, O God.
The ground is holy because you are already there.
We place ourselves in your hands and ask for all we need
to do what is asked of us.*

*Into our tiredness, pour your energy.
If we are discouraged, bring us your hope.
If we cannot see the way, give to us your wisdom.*

May you go into Lent with a lifting of the heart. And may Christ's Spirit be in your beginnings, and endings, and all the seasons in between,

To Everything There is a Season

In December 2020, the Missions Committee endeavored to grow its relationship with our mission partner, Lift Urban Portland, which works to eradicate food insecurity in the Portland Metro area. We did this by officially adopting the Alder House building, our direct neighbor. (Alder House is a low-income building that provided low-barrier housing for people moving from being unhoused to finding a more permanent home.) With the adoption fee, FPC financially sponsors food boxes for residents and a supper club program that teaches cooking skills and nutrition. It also established an emergency food closet (EFC) in the building. At the time of the adoption, Alder House did not have space for an EFC, which provided a unique opportunity for our church to step up! Not only were we able to provide space, but it was also an opportunity to build relationships with our neighbors.

Housed in our Julia west property, the EFC has handed out over 1,675 bags of food and hygiene items in the last two years. A year ago, we also opened more of the Julia West building to provide community space for the residents while their building was under renovation. This December saw the completion of the renovation, including a beautiful new community space and room for the EFC. Having the EFC on the Alder House property provides easier access for residents to food when they are most in need. In time the resident service coordinator at Alder house will take over the opening and closing of the food closet. Until then, our dedicated volunteer team will staff the EFC on Tuesdays from 1-3 pm.

FPC is committed to continuing to grow our relationship with our neighbors at Alder House and will be pivoting how we serve them. Pre-pandemic, the Alder House had a relationship with the church that would provide a home-cooked meal for residents to gather around once a month. Sadly, that church is no longer able to serve in that capacity. The building coordinator reached out to our church to ask if we could foster community in that way. Listening to the movement of the Holy Spirit we said yes! Starting in February we will be cooking and serving a delicious hot meal once a month. If you would like to be a part of our team that cooks or the team that serves the meal, please reach out to Pastor Brenna to join in the fun. Many hands make light work!

Thank you to everyone who has helped support the work of the EFC over these past two years. From food and hygiene donations to our volunteer team to the West family and Open Circle ladies who put together holiday bags! We could not have done it without you. We celebrate this new season of the EFC and how it will better serve the Alder House community and we look forward to the new role we will play as their neighbors.

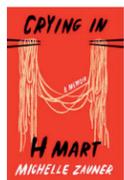
-Pastor Brenna

Room 207 becomes The Heritage Room

FPC has a beautiful and much-used room on the second floor that is the setting for study, meetings, fellowship, and more. Room 207 was originally called The Women's Parlor, and renamed after Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in 1960. The Whitmans were a missionary couple who sought to convert Native Americans of the Cayuse tribe in what is now Eastern Washington during the 1830s and 40s. Unsuccessful in that mission, they were killed—along with several others—by members of the tribe in 1847. Their deaths led the U.S. government to focus more on expanding and protecting the number of settlers coming on the Oregon Trail, and to the near-decimation of the Cayuse tribe.

After 18 months of study and reflection, Session has voted to change the name of room 207 from The Whitman Room to The Heritage Room. Many church members read books and participated in a two-part class about Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, and there has been a display in the chapel narthex for several months. A working group of elders met and drafted a proposal for the Session.

A slate of possible names was voted upon, including the Whitman name and the names of others who were directly tied to FPC; a ranked-choice voting method was used. The selection of the name The Heritage Room offers us the opportunity to shine a light on many worthy individuals who have left a positive legacy for themselves and our church. On February 12 we will hold our coffee hour in this room, with a prayer of re-dedication.



Women's Book Club

The Women's Book Club will meet on Tuesday, February 7 at noon on Zoom and also at the church. The book, "Crying in the H Mart" by Michelle Zauner is a memoir about a mother/daughter relationship and the author's connection to her Korean culture and ethnic foods after her mother's death. Kara Morris will lead the discussion. For more information contact Marilyn Weber via email or call at 503 241-4081.

Into Narnia and Back

By popular demand, FPC's guru in literature and film, Dale Hess, will be presenting a three-session course on Narnia hosted in the Heritage Room (207) from 12-1 pm on Sundays.

Into Narnia and Back will look at how one gets into Narnia and how one gets out. Although there are more kinds than we can easily see, there is one simple answer. You are called and so you enter; you are sent and so you leave.

We will be looking at the beginning and end of the three Narnia stories that have so far been made into films. On the first Sunday, February 5, we will look at the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe. (Dale will offer you an actual photograph of the wardrobe.) We will see the four children enter haphazardly and leave as the firmest of friends.

On the second Sunday, February 12, we see the beginning and ending clips from Prince Caspian. We will approach it with our two questions again. How did the children get into Narnia and how did they get out. They got in because they were called by the Great Horn of Queen Susan, which was left there in the previous story.

On the final Sunday, February 19, we will see the beginning and ending clips from The Voyage of the Dawne Treader. The younger two Pevensie children, Edmund and Lucy, are called back, along with a new voyager, Eustace Scrubb. And again, at the end, all are sent back to England, but decisively changed by having been with Aslan. This is the story with the clearest and most powerful theological statement of the three films.

We hope to see you there. If you have any questions please contact Dale at psudough@gmail.com

Welcoming Everybody

This month the children's ministry of FPC is helping us grow in our inclusivity! Our church has long been committed to welcoming everyone - young and old, rich and poor - and this month we will specifically be talking about the many gifts people experiencing disability have to offer the world! Our congregation is stronger and richer when ALL have a place at the table! Please plan on joining us for an educational event after church on February 26th where we will be welcoming Cody Goldberg from "Harper's Playground", a local organization committed to changing the world one playground at a time. Harper's Playground creates inviting play spaces for people of all abilities and several FPC members have strong connections to this organization and its mission. Our church will have a chance to talk about play, and the teachings of Jesus that support inclusivity, and give money to this wonderful organization. In the spring we plan to organize a church playdate at one of the parks designed by Harper's Playground and we look forward to giving the children of our church an opportunity to help make a difference in the wider community. Truly, everybody has a role to play in the story of God!



Special Coffee Hours in Advent: The Weary World Rejoices!

On December Sundays after worship, all in attendance were invited to enjoy bountiful, beautiful food and a communal celebration of that week's Advent theme (hope, peace, joy, and love). Each week over 100 people lingered in the lovingly decorated chapel and chapel narthex (thanks in particular to Linda Lewis and Cindy Finch), sharing conversation and participating in the special activities of the day.

Sarah Schwab and Amy Meabe, fellowship committee co-chairs, explained the purpose of the special Advent coffee hours. Sarah said, "We wanted our church to be a place to step away from the holiday consumerism push and focus on the importance of Christ coming into the world." Amy Meabe described hitting upon the phrase "the weary world rejoices" (from the Christmas hymn "O Holy Night") as an overarching tagline that was especially appropriate after the pandemic and all the troubles we hear about in each day's news. She added that activities were designed for a range of ages and to encourage talking with others.

We owe a debt of gratitude to many volunteers and particularly retired caterer/baker Linda Lewis who planned the special Advent menus and prepared much of the food. Folks who stayed after the 5:00 pm Christmas Eve service were delighted to find a birthday party for Jesus! On Christmas Day, those who attended the service stayed for over an hour, enjoying more of the birthday party treats and meaningful fellowship on the day of Christ's birth.